1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

CHAPTER V

PRIMARY ADAPTATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

THE GENERAL PROBLEM

The economic life of a people is essentially concerned with relating the primary technological adaptation to nature and the community's secondary adaptation which is its social organization. Many peoples have developed a separate set of unified social mechanisms which are roughly called their economic systems, such as the organized market of modern capitalism or the simpler and less developed systems of agricultural barbarism. The tools and implements are formed into a general order of making and using to exact a supply of food and other creature necessities from nature, and they are then used by the population of a group in a systematized manner through a set of conventions and social usages which are dictated by the social organization. The social organization regulates the technology and helps discipline the distribution and consumption of its productivity.

The Murngin have not created a separate economic structure and are dependent on their other social institutions to regulate indirectly their technology and control the distribution and the consumption of goods and services.[1] The present chapter will be concerned with the purely economic aspects of the social structure, and with artifacts and their manufacture and use.

1. The Place of the Murngin Social Structure in Organizing Production of Creature Necessities

1. *The Horde*

The horde is an unstable economic group whose membership and size are regulated by the seasonal cycle. In the rainy months this group may be, and frequently is, only a kinship group composed of a few brothers and their wives and children or possibly "brothers-in-law" and their families. (These relatives are usually connected by blood.) When the dry season begins and the various food-producing areas are

[1] The economic horde-organization is only partly an exception to this.

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
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open to human occupation by the drying of the land, the burning of the spear grass, and the disappearance of the swarms of vicious insects, these smaller groups coalesce into larger units which may contain as many as thirty or forty people and will contain many more if a large ritual is being celebrated. Every member of this group is related closely to at least one or more other individuals in the group, but to the rest he is only tribally related. Where the sea-turtle eggs on the sand beaches are most plentiful, the oyster beds most prolific and accessible, sea-bird eggs most abundant, lily and yam swamps most productive, and the cycad palm nuts ripened and ready for picking, there will be found the horde groups.

All of the people in the horde will be of friendly clans which are usually closely intermarried; if there are antagonisms they are suppressed or given expression in a peace-making makarata, which allows those involved to remain in harmony. As soon as food is plentiful the better areas usually become locations for the great rituals which take place at this time; the ceremonial life definitely enlarges the size of the horde groups. The camp of the horde is organized spatially in the same way as the clan lands are spatially related to each other.

Ritual sanctions at this time help prevent open strife, which is always a possibility whenever the clans come together. The belief that the totem will be offended if clashes occur between opposing clansmen usually keeps the peace. Ritual sanction, then, is the most powerful force in regulating the peaceful behavior of these larger food-gathering hordes. If it were not for these extreme sanctions the larger hordes could not be formed. Peoples with a background of feud and warfare who might not otherwise risk meeting one another can be fairly certain of peace in a horde gathered for a ritual. Since the local clans which start the ceremony have it well under way and the totemic emblems have been made and are in the camp by the time the first guests arrive, hesitant visitors can feel comparatively safe in coming to the ceremony. The bitterly antagonistic clans, however, who have a continuous blood feud tradition and a record of killing back of them would never be present unless under extreme circumstances, for religious sanctions or peace-making duels would not prevent open strife and possible secret killings between them.

The horde, then, is governed by the seasonal fluctuation of plenty or scarcity, and its extreme in size is effected by the attractive stimuli of important ceremonies.

The usual division of labor obtains during the period of the larger

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
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in the general topography of northeastern Arnhem Land. The clan structure is not a mere exogamic group which occupies a certain extended territory and whose people earn their living from this area. In the first place, all its female members are usually not attached to the land itself, for after reaching early adolescence they go as wives and potential mothers to other clans than their own; the wives and mothers of the local clan come from other areas and are therefore not thought of as belonging to this particular piece of land. Spatial unity is disrupted and the Murngin clan is seen to be an entirely different social entity from our modern state. Further, the economic unit of this people is not the clan but the horde. 773 614

The horde's membership is composed of men from a number of clans as well as of women from different groups. The clan composition of a horde becomes more heterogeneous during the dry season when an area can support a larger number of people, than in the rainy season when food is scarce. The male membership of the clan is seldom spatially intact except during the ritual season when all of the male members are more likely to be present than in the rainy period. The clan's so-called "ownership" of the land has little of the economic about it. Friendly peoples wander over the food areas of others and, if their area happens to be poor in food production, possibly spend more of their lives on the territory of other clans than on their own. Exclusive use of the group's territory by the group is not a part of the Murngin idea of land "ownership." The ownership of the land is more in the "nature of things," as seen by the Murngin. The land is not outside the clan but is an integral part of it. As has been said, it cannot be taken from the clan, for it is of the clan and made such by the order of existence. "Wongar made it that way and that's why we have these things today." 621 614 423

Politically the clan is almost impotent when it comes to positive action. It is impossible to obtain group action, even for the wergild, which will function to the extent that discipline can be enforced and individual action prohibited in a blood feud. The ceremonial leader is considered head man, and if physically able and of sufficient talent, he is also war leader, but his power is at an absolute minimum except as a ritual leader; it is in the field of ritual and not of government that he exercises his leadership. 614 622

The names of the country, the names of the wells, and the list of totems as well as the names of the mythological ancestors all form fundamental parts of the clan unity. All of the names of the clan 103 614 773 182 778

2: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1955
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611 613 descent group which can be brought into focus by consideration of its corporateness, its sense of common acting and belonging, its oneness as the *babaru*. I would prefer to call the members of this *babaru*, in totality, a *unilineal descent group* (e.g., Fortes, 1953:25) or *corporate descent group*. In its narrowest sense it is the direct line from F.F. to S.S., in its widest it incorporates male siblings of these persons, and female siblings of each generation grade who have not married outside. But the corporate descent group must exclude female siblings who are not coresident, for the term "corporate" suggests sufficiently close residence to enable more or less regular participation in organized group activities.

Now the patri-line suggests agnatic descent. Diagrammatically or otherwise we can speak of this collection of people as having each a definite position in such a *line*, but together they form the unilineal descent group and behave as a corporate unit. I do not consider that the use of the term "local line" in preference to "descent line" refines our definitions. But if we use descent line or patri-line to signify the type of descent, and to refer to an EGO's *immediate male* forebears and descendants, taking into account the depth of genealogical memory (in this case normally five generation levels, two above and two below), then it is a useful term. If we are to indicate the corporateness of the *babaru*, which will include male siblings and their S. and S.S., as well as unmarried female siblings of each of these, then we must use a descriptive term like "unilineal descent group" or "corporate descent group" or even Leach's "local descent group." The diagrammatization of this group may be designated the "local line," signifying its acknowledged totality.

D. *The Patri-Line (Descent Line): Corporate Descent Group.* Now the patri-line (descent line) is the minimal descent group. It is coresident with the maximal descent group, i.e., the totality of the acknowledged corporate descent group noted above.

611 613 621 All these male relatives (kin) with their wives occupy a specified tract of country over which they have hunting and fishing rights. In this area reside the spirits of their ancestors; in it are found their sacred sites and totemic centers, and to it belong their sacred designs and emblems. Excluding their wives they are the *corporate descent group;* including their wives, they are the *local horde*, the male-female co-operative hunting, fishing, and food-collecting unit.

613 614 621 197 [602] E. *Parallel Descent Groups (Linguistic Group).* But within this specified territory are *parallel descent groups*. There may not be many of these, perhaps no more than two or three or at the most half a dozen. But together they form the *mada* or *linguistic group*.[4] Persons of the same generation level in these parallel descent groups are classificatory brothers, acknowledging a common ancestry, which may not always be genealogically traceable. They do not form a *clan* (*mala*), but together (as parallel descent groups) comprise one of several linguistic groups which make up the clan. Several *babaru* of varying size, then, in a parallel fashion, form the linguistic group.

613 F. *Minimal and Maximal Range of Babaru.* The *babaru* (the corporate descent group) tends to be the smallest unit outside EGO's direct descent line.

2: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1955
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Male siblings of any generation may segment with their descendants: this is particularly the case with male siblings of the second and third ascending generation levels. Actual relationship between members of these parallel groups tends to be somewhat vaguely conceived after the second generation, when use may be made of classificatory terminology considered to be more or less accurate. Each parallel group tends, too, to be more or less of the same size. The linguistic group signifying its maximal range is exogamous. Now, in my opinion the linguistic group could be treated as a lineage: but our labeling it a lineage would depend on our definition.

It may be possible to view the *babarn* as the effective nuclear lineage, conforming with Fortes' definition (1949:9): thus each "segment" would be an effective nuclear lineage which in toto (and in parallel linkage) would form the wider lineage or linguistic group. But our definition of lineage would have to be made, not only in terms of genealogically traceable male relatives, but also by allowing some coverage of classificatory male relatives who are viewed as belonging to a common unilineal descent group—which is exactly what the linguistic group is.

G. *Nature of Linguistic Group and Clan.* Each descent group is the *babarn;* it forms the basis for the expanded family, spread across the parallel descent groups within the linguistic group. All male members of the *babarn* have a common interest and a sense of belonging to a common stretch of country, of sharing a common sacred background. The head of the *babarn* will be the MARIMO, and it is upon his decision (usually) that fights and feuds are begun, continued, and terminated: he is, more or less, the jural head of his group. As we have seen, several of such groups form the linguistic group, which means that such parallel groups not only occupy the same ground, hunt together, join in sacred ceremonies together, and so on, but also speak a common dialect which distinguishes them from other linguistic groups. As a linguistic group, these parallel descent groups have in common sacred emblems, songs, sections of mythology, and patterns or totemic designs.

Now, it is true that, as Leach has remarked (1951:25), "The number of basic descent lines in such a diagram [i.e., the kinship system set out diagrammatically] depends merely upon how many different kinds of relative are recognized in the grandfather's generation. It has nothing to do with the number of local descent groups existing in the society." But the classification of such a system into seven basic and secondary patri-lines that symbolize local descent groups is an indication that a categorization takes place. This categorization is an abstract, so to speak, of what actually occurs. It is nothing so rigid as seven "watertight" groups; but what is inferred is a scattering of consanguineal and affinal relatives, throughout a number of linguistic groups. It symbolizes range.

Within the parallel groups forming a linguistic group one finds all kin who are actual and classificatory F.F., F., S., and so on. One might also conceivably find a scattering of relatives who belong to the patri-line of one's MARI, assuming the close identification of MARI with MARIMO. But usually the

2: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1955
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acceptance of this aspect will depend on our definition of political structure and its relevance in northeastern Arnhem Land. It is beyond our scope here to discuss this aspect in detail. If, as Radcliffe-Brown has said (1950:xiv), when we are dealing with political systems we are dealing with law on the one hand, and with war on the other, then for the Wulamba we must define what these two concepts mean. Or again, Radcliffe-Brown has shown that in seeking to define the political structure among the Australian Aborigines, we must consider the territorial community which is united by the rule of law. Is this political community among the Wulamba indeterminate? Thus in such a society the political structure concerns the grouping together of individuals within a territorial framework—a separation of group from group within the total system, which may be described in terms of war, feud, and the exercise of recognized authority in settling disputes, and so on. This would of course involve some differentiation of social rôle between persons and between classes of persons. As Radcliffe-Brown has pointed out (1950:xx, xxi), in an area such as the Wulamba, this would involve differentiation on the basis of sex and age and the noninstitutionalized recognition of leadership in ritual, in hunting, in warfare and in craft-specialization, and so on. We may say with Warner (1937) and Leach (1951:53), as I have already mentioned above, that a number of local groups (or corporate or unilineal descent groups) are tied together in a network of kinship, forming a loosely knit political system. For this means in effect that we have the minimal and maximal corporate descent groups, linking in parallel fashion to form a linguistic group, several of the latter forming a clan and all clans being linked in a cultural and social bloc which I have called the Wulamba. Nevertheless, there is no real political solidarity, as we understand it above, among the peoples so linked. There is, however, a loosely conceived political solidarity among those parallel descent groups forming the linguistic group. And that such groups are closely linked in kinship is obvious from what we have said. Many questions could be raised at this juncture concerning concepts of common action in feud and fighting and in the maintenance of law in this context. But again, without considering this in detail, we must say that the linguistic group does not act as one, however closely associated and intimately connected its members may be, scattered among the parallel descent groups, even though they occupy a common, acknowledged, territory and engage together in common ceremonies, belong to the one moiety, speak the one language (or dialect), possess the one sacred emblems and patterns, invocations, and so on. They are the common residential unit; but the political unit, if we may call it that, is the corporate unilineal descent group in its maximal span. A series (two, three, or more) of these political units in parallel fashion form the linguistic group: but political autonomy rests upon each of these units. At this juncture let me discuss briefly the function of such a corporate unilineal descent group. We have already mentioned some of its features, but now we must elaborate its corporate activities in order to justify its being termed a political unit, and to enable us to discuss it in relation to the generalizations indicated by Fortes (1953:24).

This corporate unilineal descent group tends to be the smallest unit outside EGO's direct descent line, the composition of which I have mentioned above. This is the *babaru*. It is corporate—the body politic—because its male members will always act together, particularly in ritual observances: it may be distinguished from other linked *babaru*, forming the linguistic group, when such ceremonies are in progress. However closely linked these individual *babaru* may be, they are considered sectionally in one sense as separate entities. Each *babaru* is entitled to contribute its own sacred emblems (which may be of the same patterning as the other linked *babaru* within the linguistic group), and to modify and elaborate designs as it desires. Each *babaru*, among other things, will contribute sacred communal cycad nut "bread." 613

All male members of a *babaru* will engage in hunting together, but in this context they are the corporate group *plus*—and this plus will include their wives, so that they hunt as a local horde. But when they hunt for kangaroo, male members of the *babaru* hunt together and share as one: it is the same with fishing. They are the unit which will engage in feuds and in reprisals—brothers stand with brothers, fathers with sons, parallel cousins with parallel cousins, and so on. They are both the defensive and offensive unit. They can at times be allied with parallel *babaru* for this purpose; but when this is done payments are required, whereas within the unit no payment is considered necessary in cases of emergency. 613 621 [624] [628]

In the settling of disputes—in what is known as the *magurada*, when the accused runs the gauntlet, his accusers throwing spears at him—it is the *babaru* as one which throws the spears, on the one hand, and, on the other, the *baparu* of the accused which reinforces him on the other side of the ground. Allied *babaru* will stand close by, but it is the single *babaru* which acts. The head of the individual *babaru* is also the jural head; he makes decisions and maintains order within the several domestic circles constituting the *babaru* and its adherents. 613 628

The *babaru* too occupies usually a particular stretch of country, but this may be ill-defined, as the linguistic group—the linked parallel *baparu*—is said to be the landholding unit. It does not own the land, but holds it in custody for past generations of ancestors and future generations. Land can never be alienated, sold, or occupied by another group. (This is an aspect which needs greater consideration.) When we say that the linguistic group occupies a certain territory, we are saying mainly that it is traditionally associated with this. It may not always be present on it. The several linked *babaru* may separate and, at certain seasons with wives of their male members, wander as local hordes over the lands of other linguistic groups: but for their ceremonies, for their burials, and for a greater part of the year, they will be located in their relevant linguistic group, the boundaries of which are fairly clearly defined and are never questioned. 613 621 423

Considering these aspects, we feel justified in calling the unilineal descent group corporate. Moreover, this is the primary unit around which the Wulamba kinship system has been assembled. 601 613

2: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1955
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[6] I would not say, however, that Thomson's material (1949) on ceremonial economic exchange fills many gaps, if any, in Warner's data (see Leach 1951:34). It is obvious, I think, both from his material and from ours, that exchanges of this nature between M.B. and Sr.S. comprise merely one element in a wide system of economic exchanges. Goods travel backwards and forwards through the network of cognatic relationships, against a background of linked and allied linguistic groups, in a traditionally prescribed fashion, between certain specified kin, passing outside the periphery of the Wulamba bloc into and from alien Aboriginal or European (or Indonesian, as before) channels. Such exchanges consist of specified objects or commodities, which move in different directions across the surface of the whole country; but this is only one aspect relevant to the total kinship system.

Also, I would agree with Leach (p. 52) that in a marriage exchange the equivalent of a woman is not only another woman, and that the equivalent of a woman may be found not only in goods and labor and symbolic objects. Certain intangibles can play a part—and these may involve prestige, rights, services, and perhaps status. Little work, as yet, has been done in consideration of these. Reciprocal exchanges between males and females, or between females, should also be discussed in much greater detail, for these are not just reflections of exchanges between male partners. It is not satisfactory to consider an EGO as being always a male, as has been done in most discussions of kinship systems. Where prestations occur between male and female kin, these seem to conform with traditional patterns; but between female kin (i.e., among the Wulamba), this is not so apparent.

[7] Radcliffe-Brown (1931:4–5) calls the local group a horde: he states that each horde is independent and autonomous, managing its own affairs and acting as a unit in its relations with other hordes (however, see pp. 28, 106). Elkin (1938:39–41, 73–74) discusses the local group: it is, he tells us, an enlarged family, consisting of a man and his living descendants in the male line; such a group can be a local patrilineal clan. Elkin then draws a distinction between the local group and the horde, which is as we have defined it above. In fact his statements would, I think, agree with our own here.

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3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 Oll7 Murngin Oll7

seashore, usually with the points of their fingers. Some of the children were particularly dexterous. Plate 91C is a sand drawing of a goanna and Pl. 91D a moulded figure of a fish.

In Central Australia, I often saw the aboriginal children drawing simple figures on the sides of the drifting sand-hills. Barrett and Croll[2] illustrate figures of dugongs, sharks, crocodiles and even a lugger in sail, which the aborigines of the Wessel Islands had scooped in the sand.

5. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND DESIGN

The social organization of the aborigines of north-eastern Arnhem Land dominates every aspect of their social, ceremonial, philosophical and cultural life.

Warner[3] published a list of the clans (which we now call *mala*), the high and low totems of each clan, the language groups (*mata*) and the names of the totemic waterholes. This list is by far the most valuable information we have on the subject. Warner,[4] however, although obviously puzzled about the matter, made the mistake of grouping the aborigines of north-eastern Arnhem Land into tribes instead of clans, failing to recognize that the clan was the most powerful unit.

Thomson,[5] when referring to the same social organization, pointed out Warner's mistake, and at the same time defined the word *malla* (my *mala*) as referring to a strong patrilineal group linked together by the same totemic ancestors. Elkin and the Berndts[6] list some of the *dua* and *jiritja* clans (*mala*) and language groups (*mata*). I also was able to obtain additional data on the subject. Nevertheless, our knowledge of the *malas* and *matas* is still very incomplete.

As my research on the art of the aborigines of north-eastern Arnhem Land developed, however, it became evident that the effects of this social organization was as powerful in the realms of pictorial art as it is in other aspects of their culture. I found that aborigines who had totemic ancestors in common were using designs on their bark paintings and other art objects which were unlike those employed by men of different clan affiliations. Inquiries also revealed that many, perhaps all, of these designs, the property of any particular language group or *mata*, had been handed down to them by one or another of their mythical totemic ancestors.[7]

2. Barrett and Croll (1943), Pl. 71, facing p. 76. 3. Warner (1937), pp. 39-51.
4. Warner (1937), p. 35, writes: 'The tribes of northeastern Arnhem Land . . . are very weak social units, and when measured by the ordinary definitions of what constitutes a tribe fail almost completely.'
5. Thomson (1949), p. 11. 6. Elkin and the Berndts (1950), p. 23.
7. For origin of designs see myths of *Ngaru-gajameri* and the *gunjun* crab design, p. 298; *Banaitja* and the *jiritja* designs, p. 281; *borodji* the snake, and other *jiritja* designs, p. 309; *Djunkgao* and the light on the waves, the rising sun and the parallel lines of sand-hills, p. 273.

5: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1934
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Kumandjan woman's children will always belong to the Bulain sub-section, and this order obtains right through the intermarriage of the eight sub-sections of the tribe. 582 611 616 617

All the members of each sub-section, both male and female, possess a definite relationship to some particular bird or animal, which constitutes their class totem or "jungoin." This form of totemism is but poorly developed, and any mature person, after passing through a brief ceremony, may freely kill and eat his or her totem animal. (See page 16.) 616 617

In this area the distinctive feature of the tribal organisation is the emphasis placed on the local hordes or clans, which are of great number, and in some cases contain but few individuals. Each horde consists of men of one moiety only, with their wives of the opposite moiety, and each horde possesses a definitely defined territory, which in every case includes a ceremonial totemic centre. This ceremonial totemism is, in contrast to the class totemism, very highly developed, and is of the utmost significance and importance. 614 621 778

These ceremonial totems, which are very numerous, in the vast majority of cases consist of— 532 778

(a) Representations of utensils and implements believed to have been originated, used and conferred upon the people by certain mythological ancestors.

(b) Representations of natural species associated in legend with these ancestors.

(c) Representations of these mythological ancestors themselves.

All of these are highly conventionalised in design.

These "Muraian," as they are called, lie at the basis of most of the ceremonial life of the people. They are most jealously guarded, and are believed to exercise a profound influence on the fortunes of the clan. The revelation of and the explanation of these "Muraian" constitute one of the most important stages in the education of the young men. 614 778

During the "Nara" ceremonies, which are associated with these "Muraian," the initiates have impressed upon them the ancient tribal regulations and sanctions. They are warned against being insolent to their elders, against dishonesty, against lying, against improper relations with women, and so are enforced many excellent ethical lessons. During their period of instruction they are placed under a food tabu, and are informed that any breach of the regulations taught will result in illness or deformity. 796 867 [784]

778 The aid of these "Muraian," in which are believed to reside the spirits of their tribal ancestors, may be invoked, and I have heard an old man, addressing a group of initiates, declare that he had lived to an old age because he had been true to his "Muraian," which, he said, had protected him from his enemies and generally cared for him. One man told me that when away out at sea in his canoe, and being suddenly overtaken by a violent storm, he had called upon his "Muraian," and by their aid had been brought safely to land.

614 621 688 796 [778] During the preparations for, or the holding of, these ceremonies[1] it is expected that all matters likely to disturb the peace will be carefully avoided. If someone commits an offence during that period it is regarded as an insult to the particular "Muraian" concerned, and the men of the horde become most violently angry. In such a case the offender must make liberal payments to the chief men of the horde, who, in extreme cases, however, are not satisfied until the offender has been seriously injured, or even killed.

561 778 [587] Though at an early age youths are given some information concerning their own "Muraian," no man undertakes the manufacture of these sacred objects before middle life, and then only under the direction of the old men. From time to time, as opportunity presents itself, a man is shown the "Muraian" of hordes other than his own. Such knowledge is in no way compulsory or essential to his taking his full place in the tribal life, but rather marks an additional stage in his education, and so increases his influence.

614 616 619 778 It is through these "Muraian" that the only cohesion between the various scattered hordes is obtained. Hordes or clans of the same moiety, though as widely separated as Elcho Island and Blue Mud Bay, hold in reverence the same mythological ancestors, possess the same "Muraian," and so regard themselves as the same people.

060 It will be seen, from the above, how wide is the influence of these totemic beliefs, and how important a place they occupy in the life of the people. Further brief reference will be made to them under the heading of Death and Burial Beliefs and Customs.

1 [i.e. "NARA" CEREMONIES — ANALYST]

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943)1949
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tensity of their relationship, gauged by the degree of totemic inheritance. But these groups are certainly not tribes.[9]

The clan, or in practice its occupational group, the horde (*vide infra* p. 12), is the most important unit of social life in Arnhem Land. The clan is the territorial or land-owning group, but the horde is the war-making group, and each horde is to a large extent independent and self-governing. Anything approaching kingship or chieftainship is unknown in Arnhem Land. Law, order and discipline is laid down by tradition. It is defined in the mythology, and in the sagas of the culture heroes, and is maintained by public opinion, enforced by the old men, who act as custodians of the heritage of the clan. The authority of the old men is backed, in turn, by the *wänärr*, the totemic ancestors themselves, whose edicts are enforced by the threat of supernatural sanctions.

There is no individual ownership of land. Land ownership is vested in the clan as the hereditary group, and as this is a *patrilineal*[10] society, a man is born into his father's clan and has hunting rights over the territory of his own clan and generally over that of several others, particularly that

[9] The arbitrary use of the term *Murngin*, "tribe", for the people of Eastern Arnhem Land, which was introduced by Professor W. Lloyd Warner (*A Black Civilisation*; New York and London, 1937) is particularly unfortunate, for as was pointed out (footnote 5) east of Cape Stewart in North Central Arnhem Land tribal organisation is conspicuous by its absence from the intricate social organisation of the area, although it appears again at Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria, and occurs along the Roper River. The word *murngin* has nothing to do with social organisation, and is in no sense the name of a "tribe".

[10] Descent, among the aborigines, in family, clan and certain other hereditary groups, is reckoned either in the male line, i.e. through the father, in which case it is called *patrilineal*, or through the mother, when it is called *matrilineal*.

of his mother, which is known by a distinctive term, *yindi-pulo*, (*yindi*, big). The mother's clan stands in a special relationship, and a man regards its members as his own people. In times of trouble or feud, or during the quarrels about women which rage intermittently, he can be assured of sanctuary there. (*Yindipulo* applies to the mother's clan itself, and to members of the clan collectively.) They take his part in fights and he exercises hunting rights over their territory as if he belonged to the clan. A special relationship exists between a man and his mother's brother, called *kauwäl* (reciprocal term *wäkku*), who is a member of the mother's clan. This man is regarded as "like a mother" and he remains a special friend and ally throughout life.

In Arnhem Land the most important unit of social life is the family, the group which consists of a man, his wife or wives and their children. The family unit however lies outside the clan organisation, for the clan is a group whose members are either bound by ties of kinship and the bond of descent from a common totemic ancestor or by a belief that they share this bond, and they are also linked by the possession of totems in common. And since the people are patrilineal and the clan group is *exogamous*[11]—that is, a man may not marry a woman of the same clan—the group which actually *occupies* the clan territory is made up of the male members of the clan and their children, *plus* their wives (who remain members of other clans—the clans into which they were born), and *minus* those female members of the clan who have married into other clans. To this occupational group the name "horde" is applied. The clan is an hereditary group, entry into which is by birth alone, but a person may enter a horde by marriage or by adoption. The *clan* is a permanent and stable unit of social organisation; the

[11] See footnote 7 (page 10), on the dual division and exogamy.

horde rests on no such solid foundation and is unstable. 614 621

Membership of each group within this complex segmentary organisation carries its own (often conflicting) solidarity and obligations, which however, form an integral scheme. Obligation and counter-obligation, defined by membership of the clan, and especially by kinship, supplies the incentive to work, to produce wealth and *gerri*, (page 5). Kinship also provides the chief basis for the division of the proceeds of communal enterprise. 602

Before discussing the economic structure in detail, it is necessary to look at the environment, the background, in which the aborigine lives. We must examine the natural resources which are available to him both for the gathering of food and for the manufacture of weapons, implements and utensils, as well as for the building of houses and watercraft. It is necessary to study the methods he has developed for the exploitation of these resources, for the collecting of raw material, for the manufacture of food and the utensils necessary in his domestic economy and activities. It is necessary, also, to examine any mechanisms which he may have developed for the distribution of these goods between individuals within a group, or between groups, and again, in a wider field, to trace the beginning of any system of barter or trade in manufactured objects or commodities, with groups in distant areas. 121

Does such exchange or trade exist? Is it a regular, (organised) matter or merely casual and sporadic? How is it carried out, and what is the motive force, the incentive, which is required to overcome the difficulties inherent in the "segmentary organisation" which would tend to prevent any extensive form of intercourse between widely separated groups? We have seen already that the segmentary organisation, which divides the people into small groups, each with an intense internal solidarity, also furnishes a basis for 571 619

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943)1949
O117 Murngin O117

GLOSSARY

Clan. The clan (not "tribe") is the most important permanent unit of social life in Arnhem Land. It is an aggregation of families, the members of which are linked together by the possession of totems in common and the belief that they are all linked together by descent from a common ancestor or ancestors. Entry into the clan is by birth alone. The clan group is comprised of a man and all his relations in the male line (since the people are *patrilineal*), i.e. his father, father's brothers and father's sisters, his own brothers and sisters and his sons and daughters and all the children of the male members of the clan. The clan is exogamous, that is, a man may not marry within his own clan. This means that the group which at any time *occupies* a clan territory actually consists of the male members of the clan and their children, including their daughters who are not yet married, as well as women who are members of other clans and who have married men of the clan, minus those women of the clan who have married into other clans and gone to live with their husbands. For this functional, *occupational*, group, the name *horde* is used (see below). The clan is the heredity land-owning group, but the war-making group is generally the horde.

Classificatory system of relationship. The kinship system of the Australian aborigines is known as "*classificatory*" because it extends indefinitely the relationships set up by the family by applying the terms which a man uses for his own kin to a large number of people with whom no actual genetic relationship can be traced and whom we should not call relatives at all. Thus a man uses the term which he applies to his own father not only for his father's brothers, but also for all the people whom in the widest sense, his father calls "brother". In this way the family system is extended indefinitely and groups together with own kin, not only all the members of a man's own clan, but also all the people he meets in the normal course of his life. When he knows what term he applies to a man he knows how he should behave to him and also what his obligations are.

616 ***"Dual division"*** **or** ***"dual organisation"*****, cuts right through the social organisation of Arnhem Land (as in many other parts of Australia and elsewhere), dividing it into two halves or "moieties", so that half the clans, with their totems, fall into one moiety and half into the other moiety.**

In Arnhem Land the moieties are called *dua* and *yiritja*, but they are not always actually named and the *dual division* may be present and may function without the moieties bearing names. Often the natives believe that they can detect physical differences between the members of the two moieties. Sometimes they assert that the people of one moiety have curly hair and those of the other straight, or that there are differences in eye or skin colour. There is often a marked *"opposition"* between moieties to which formal expression is given on ceremonial occasions. This formal or "organised" opposition finds expression, and is often stressed, in the mythology, and especially in totemism, the whole of the totemic organisation being divided between the two moieties.

784 783 673 ***Euphoria.*** **A state of social well-being brought about by the correct observance of ritual behaviour, especially of tabus, in contrast with *disphoria*, a "ritual state of sin" or "bad luck" due to the breaking of tabus. Generally a formal rite of expiation or "purification" of a type laid down by tradition, must be carried out by the individual or by the group to restore a state of *euphoria*.**

582 ***Exogamy*** **is simply the rule of "marrying out" as opposed to *endogamy*—marriage within the group. In Arnhem Land society the family, clan and moiety are all strictly exogamous and each of these groups is comprised of people with whom marriage is not only not permitted, but to whom, under the kinship system, the pattern of behaviour is incompatible with that towards a wife or husband.**

592 595 ***Family.*** **This is the fundamental unit in social life. In Australia it is the group consisting of a man and his wife or wives, (for these people are *polygynous*), with their young children, own or adopted. Each family lives as a separate, and to a large extent independent, unit, within the camp of the horde. It makes its own fire around which its domestic life is centred and at which it prepares its own food. Around the fireside the food is eaten and here the family sleeps and lives its own separate life.**

621 ***Horde,*** **is the name given to the group which at any time actually *occupies* a clan territory. It is the important functional group and is generally the war-making and law-making group and is an independent social and political unity, but its membership may change, and it lacks the permanence and stability of the clan, the group which a man enters by birth alone.**

[P.406]

TRIBAL ORGANIZATION IN EASTERN ARNHEM LAND

By T. THEODOR WEBB[1]

131 THE aboriginal peoples referred to in this paper are those occupying the country to the north-east of a line running roughly from Cape Stewart on the north coast of Arnhem Land to Blue Mud Bay in the Gulf of Carpentaria, and extending to the sea coast and the adjacent islands. The social organization of these peoples is marked 621 by a very pronounced emphasis on the importance of the horde, each of which exists as an almost entirely independent unit. These hordes are very numerous; some of them are very small, and there is definite evidence that several of them have actually become extinct, at least in so far as their patrilineal descent as a separate unit is concerned. With the few exceptions mentioned below, each of [197] these hordes, no matter how small, has its own particular dialect. In many cases the dialectal difference is small, and in at least one instance would appear to be consciously artificial.

621 The two moieties into which the aboriginal society is divided are known as Yiritcha and Dua respectively, and these names are 616 used without variation throughout the area indicated. Each horde is exclusively Yiritcha or Dua, as the case may be, and every man [582] obtains his wife from some other horde of the opposite moiety.

621 The two moieties are divided into eight subsections, four Yiritcha and four Dua, and the prevailing form of totemism includes 616 the definite relationship of all members, both male and female, of 617 each subsection (*marlk*), with some particular bird or animal, which is known by the individual as his or her *dzuŋoin*. These *dzuŋoin* have, as far as I am able to discover, no association with totem centres. Every member of the same subsection possesses the same *dzuŋoin*, irrespective of the horde to which he belongs.

[1]Chairman of the North Australia District of the Methodist Missionary Society of Australia.

12: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1933 OI17 Murngin OI17

The eight subsections, with their totems, are as follows:

Subsections.		Totems.
Male (Yiritcha)	Female	
Ngarit	Ngaritjan	*kurrʃumbul goroworau*[1] (slender-limbed kangaroo).
Bulain	Bulaindjan	*kurrʃumbul borumgor* (stout-limbed kangaroo).
Kaijark	Koitjan	*karrkain* (fork-tailed kite).
		kurritʃorrk (large black lizard).
		jiriwi-jiriwi (wagtail).
Bangardi	Bangaritjan	*urrpan* (emu).
(Dua)		
Buralang	Kalian	*werrti* (agile wallaby).
		dʒandil (smaller wallaby).
Balang	Bilindjan	*damala* (white-breasted sea-eagle).
Kamarung	Kumandjan	*karmarug* (wedge-tailed eagle).
Warmut	Warmutjan	*warmut* (black-breasted buzzard).
		dulaku (black-nosed kangaroo).

The moieties are determined by patrilineal descent, but the subsections by matrilineal descent.

The regular system of marriage between the subsections, with the subsections of the offspring, is as follows:—

Yiritcha man.	Dua woman.	Yiritcha children. Male.	Yiritcha children. Female.
Ngarit	Bilindjan	Bangardi	Bangaritjan
	Kalian	Kaijark	Koitjan
Bulain	Kalian	Kaijark	Koitjan
	Bilindjan	Bangardi	Bangaritjan
Kaijark	Warmutjan	Ngarit	Ngaritjan
	Kumandjan	Bulain	Bulaindjan
Bangardi	Kumandjan	Bulain	Bulaindjan
	Warmutjan	Ngarit	Ngaritdjan

Dua man.	Yiritcha woman.	Dua children. Male.	Dua children. Female.
Buralang	Bulaindjan	Warmut	Warmutjan
	Ngaritjan	Karmarung	Kumandjan
Balang	Ngaritjan	Karmarung	Kumandjan
	Bulaindjan	Warmut	Warmutjan
Karmarung	Bangaritjan	Buralang	Kalian
	Koitjan	Balang	Bilindjan
Warmut	Koitjan	Balang	Bilindjan
	Bangaritjan	Buralang	Kalian

[1] Rolled *r* is indicated by *rr*.

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582 616 It will be seen from the above that though eight subsections are recognized, these operate in four pairs, so reducing the organization in this respect to a four-section system. It should be noticed, however, that normally a man marries a woman of the first-named subsection in the above, *i.e.*, a Ngarit man regularly marries a Bilindjan woman, but under certain circumstances may marry a Kalian woman. A Buralang man regularly marries a Bulaindjan woman, but may marry a Ngaritjan woman, and so on.

778 The chief ceremonial object is called *muraian*, and each horde possesses a number. These are, in the vast majority of cases, representations of (*a*) utensils, such as digging sticks (*bartʃu*), dilly-bags (*batti*), clubs (*balata*), *etc.*, supposed to have been used by mythological ancestors; (*b*) natural species associated in legend with these ancestors; (*c*) these mythological ancestors themselves or certain of their physical organs. These *muraian* would, I suppose, be termed ceremonial totems, though it seems an abuse of the term so to apply it. *Muraian* is the common " outside " name for these objects, while the ceremonial or " inside " name is *rayga*. *Muraian* is, on rare occasions, used to indicate anything sacred or tabu, but correctly the term applies only to these particular objects, the general term for sacred being *yarin*. Thus the *muraian* or *rayga* is *yarin*.

796 ●621 778 The ceremonies associated with these *rayga* are known as *nara*,[3] but while there is found an ill-defined system of local totem centres the *nara* ceremonies are performed at any suitable place, quite frequently in the territory of another horde many miles from the totem centre to which it belongs. Not infrequently both Yiritcha and Dua hordes will unite for a *nara* ceremony, *rayga* of both moieties being used.

778 621 614 It is upon these *rayga* that the only real cohesion between the various hordes is based. Certain hordes of the same moiety, though as widely separated as Elcho Island on the north coast and Blue Mud Bay on the Gulf of Carpentaria, possess the same *rayga*, and these are regarded as belonging to the same *mala*. I leave it to be

[3] It should be noted that the *nara* ceremonies are in no sense increase rites, which are unknown in this region.

12: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1933 O117 Murngin O117

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determined whether the term tribe, sub-tribe, or some other should be applied to these *mala*.

The horde is usually referred to by the name of the dialect spoken by the members. The name of the *mala* is much less frequently used.

614 621

Below is a list, as complete as present information allows, of the hordes in this area, and the *mala* into which they are grouped. I have used a letter to indicate the *mala*, and the same letter with an accompanying figure to indicate the hordes included in the *mala*. The letter and figure associated are set down on the accompanying chart to indicate the location of the various hordes.

(A) Kalvanuk *mala* (Dua).
A.1. Liakalauomirr.
A.2. Mundalpi.
A.3. Barrarrngor.

(B) Biringal *mala* (Yiritcha).
B.1. Ritarrngor.
B.2. Malarbarrtcharai.
B.3. Buranadjini.
B.4. Kulungngor.
B.5. Mararrpa.

(C) Ding-ding *mala* (Dua).
C.1. Liakanarmirr.
C.2. Guyula.
C.3. Ngaladarr.
C.4. Mun-nerrngor.
C.5. Djarrwarrk.
C.6. Lulmarango.

(D) Munjakai *mala* (Yiritcha).
D.1. Won-guri.
D.2. Kwiyamil.
D.3. Worlkara.
D.4. Wolamangu.
D.5. Giki.
D.6. Kwiyamil.

(E) Berrkali *mala* (Yiritcha).
E.1. Kopapingo.
E.2. Daiorrorr.
E.3. Kopapingo.
E.4. Mukarrganalmiri.
E.5. Yitua.
E.6. Maratanggimiri.
E.7. Dalwongor.

(F) Jiring *mala* (Dua).
F.1. Djumbarpingo.
F.2. Durili.
F.3. Djarn.
F.4. Barlamomo.
F.5. Darmaramiri.

(G) Murngin *mala* (Yiritcha).
G.1. Warumari.
G.2. Korlpa.
G.3. Pural-pural.
G.4. Kumait.
G.5. Lamumiri.
G.6. Burata.

(H) Kauorr *mala* (Dua).
H.1. Karlpu.
H.2. Woralul.
H.3. Reraitchingu.

(I) Murungun *mala* (Dua).
I.1. Yarrnangu.
I.2. Yarrnangu.
I.3. Yarrnangu.
I.4. Kumalungga.
I.5. Malara.

(J) Wurambirrpirr *mala* (Yiritcha).
J.1. Balmaui.
J.2. Obulkara.
J.3. Kopapingo.

(K) Kukauurrta *mala* (Yiritcha).
K.1. Gunalbingo.

(L) Murangarrpiara *mala* (Dua).
L.1. Djinba.

12: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1933 OI17 Murngin OI17

621 614 197

It will be observed that two Kopapingo hordes are included in the Berrkali *mala*. These two hordes, though widely separated in location, speak the same dialect, and so are called by the same name. A Kopapingo horde is also found in the Wurambirrpirr *mala*. This horde speaks the Kopapingo dialect, but possesses the *muraian* of the Wurambirrpirr *mala*, and not those of the Barrkali *mala*. My informants were very definite that this horde therefore belonged to the former *mala*.

In the Murungun *mala* the first three hordes, though widely separated, speak the same dialect and so are called by the same name. In the case of the Kukau-urrta and Murangarrpiara it would appear that the horde is co-extensive with the *mala*. Though these *mala* are both small, it may be that in each case there are more than one horde which speak the same dialect and adjoin each other in location.

A number of the hordes have, in addition to the dialect name, a local community name also, *e.g.*, Malau-ulmurrk is the local name of the Lamumiri-speaking horde of the Murngin *mala*. As these local names are rarely if ever used by a man when speaking of his own horde, closer investigation over the whole area may reveal that they are possessed by all the hordes.

Though I have been resident among these people for the past six years I have failed to discover any name which is applied to any combination of hordes of both moieties. Neither have I discovered a name for the language of which the various tongues spoken are dialects. Kopapingo is sometimes used for the various Yiritcha dialects and Jumbarpingo in the same way for the Dua dialects.

As will be gathered, I disagree with Dr. W. Lloyd Warner in his application of the name Murngin generally to the hordes of both moieties (*Oceania*, 1, 251, 331 and 457; also *American Anthropologist*, n.s. XXXII, 207; XXXIII, 172). As I have shown, the Murngin is purely a Yiritcha *mala*. All my informants are most emphatic that no Dua man could possibly belong to the Murngin group. It is but one of several Yiritcha and Dua *mala*, the hordes of which are scattered over the same area. I therefore consider Dr. Warner's use of the name to be unfortunate and misleading.

621 197

If a tribe is to be defined as a number of neighbouring hordes which are united by the possession of a homogeneity of language

12: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1933 OI17 Murngin OI17

and custom, then it appears that all the people of the area indicated belong to the one tribe, which for the time being must remain nameless.[4]

The widely separated locations of the hordes of the same *mala* present a puzzling problem. Probably migration, at least in part, accounts for it. An example of this is found in the Daiorrorr horde of the Berrkali *mala*, which within the lifetime of its present members migrated from the south of Buckingham Bay to its present location on the Goyder River. Possibly some evidence of migration is also found in the legends of the people, including the hordes along the northern coast and the islands adjacent thereto. In these legends a very large proportion of the mythological ancestors whose exploits they relate are represented as having lived and laboured and instituted the customs of the people in the neighbourhood of Caledon and Blue Mud Bays. In some cases these ancestors are represented as starting in at that point and travelling right across the country in a north-westerly direction to the opposite coast. These same legends, with local variations, are apparently found throughout the whole area, and the social organization and the customs of the people are of the one type.

T. THEODOR WEBB

Map of North-East Arnhem Land showing approximate location of aboriginal hordes.

[4]The peoples to the west of the line indicated differ from those referred to in both language and social organization.

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
OI17 Murngin OI17

619 they also possess rituals and myths in common, and in many
614 cases, obvious dialects of one language.

Each of these groups is a patrilineal clan, the members (apart from the wives of the men), being all related in the male line; a social group consists of a man and his brothers and sisters, his children, his son's children, his brother's children and such like. Members of such a clan must never [582] marry one another, but only members of other clans, according to the kinship rules. This rule is called local exogamy. The members of the local clan, together with [621] their wives who have come to live with them (as is the [591] custom), are called a horde.

779 The most important feature of the local clan is the link
775 which binds its members to one or more sacred totemic
614 waterholes (or wells) in the clan country. The well was
[778] formed by the cult totemic hero and ancestor of the clan. In it have sojourned from the great ancestral time the spirits of all those whose earthly course is run, that is, the souls of the dead. Also associated with the well are the clan's totemic emblems and ceremonies. One important function of the latter is the maintenance of the regular order [789] of the dry and wet seasons, and the link with the creative epoch of the totem. Incidentally the souls of the dead may take up their abode, not only in the well, but also in the totemic emblems, and are believed to be present at the great totemic ceremonies. In addition they are called upon to do their part in some rites, especially in connexion with burial. [769] For example, in Chapter 14, Mr Chaseling refers to a deceased child's grandfather chanting a prayer to his own dead brother (that is, the child's 'tribal' grandfather), to come and take the child back to Buralkor, the Island of the Dead. But though a deceased person's spirit goes to this island, it returns to the totemic well in his clan's country. This may [778] seem contradictory to us, but just as space and time were no obstacle to the great ancestresses who came from the island,

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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CHAPTER SEVEN

Languages, Signs, and Smoke-Signals

197 POPULAR opinion has it that all aborigines speak one language, and I have often been asked if I can 'speak aboriginal'. Actually, there are scores of different tribal languages throughout Australia, and within these there are hundreds of horde-dialects. In the 34,000 square miles of Arnhem Land there are five distinct languages, one for each of the five groups of hordes, and as there are between a dozen and forty hordes in each horde-group, there are well over a hundred dialects in this small part of Australia.

In the group that I knew best, which extended from Cape Stewart to Blue Mud Bay, there were thirty-five hordes, each speaking its own dialect. If you had mastered one of them, Yulengor a few miles away probably could not have understood you. I found that when members of these widely separated hordes met, they could not make themselves understood in their own dialects, but experimented on several till they found one familiar to both parties.

Stone Age men are born linguists, and not only is their speech grammatically correct, but youths amuse themselves by conversing in some little-known dialect. Old Wonggu occasionally introduced a Macassar sentence into ordinary conversation so as to puzzle me, and he would enjoy his joke in using this dialect learnt fifty years previously from East Indian traders. English words and phrases, as well as pidgin English, have occasionally been picked up from traders and beachcombers.

Since it should be easier for one white man to learn an

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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CHAPTER EIGHT

Family Life in the Jungle

A FAMILY is the most important unit in aboriginal society, and the horde is founded on it. Some families have as few as three members; the largest I saw was that in which Wonggu had twenty-six wives and fifty children. A horde consists of a father's family and his sons' families, and if a few generations of sons escape their enemies' spears the horde is a large one. Upon this simple horde-family relationship depends the entire intricate, bewildering, and far-reaching aboriginal social organization.

Polygamy is an ancient custom and has an economic basis, for women are the chief food-gatherers and are coveted as assets and never regarded as expensive luxuries. A man cannot foresee the number of wives he is to have, but he hopes for several, and as his influence increases there is a tendency to bestow women on him. Bestowal of women is so arranged that old men obtain young wives and young men generally receive old widows, and incongruous as the arrangement may seem to us it ensures that old men have active women to hunt for them and their elderly wives, and that the young men, well able to look after themselves, make do with elderly widows. Prestige lies with the old men, and they enforce the practice despite constant objections from both the young men and the young women. As youths grow older their authority increases and they in turn bargain for young women.

Women live a much harder life than men, and are neglected and unwanted as they grow old before their time;

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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CHAPTER NINE

Hordes at Home and at War

616 An aboriginal myth says that tribal and social laws were made by spirit-Ancestors. Spirit-Ancestors wandered through the country begetting the first aboriginal children and instructing them in secret ceremonies, sacred songs, and dances. These first-born nomads were divided by the Ancestors into two great Dua and Yiritja moieties, and today a Dua man can marry only a Yiritja woman, or vice versa, and all children belong to the father's moiety.

616 This rule applies through the family to the numerous small hordes, for the horde is an enlarged patriarchal family in which the men and their children are members of one of the moieties, and wives and mothers belong to the other. Unmarried adult daughters and sisters are unknown in any horde, for they are bestowed in childhood to become wives in hordes of the opposite moiety.

617 Each moiety includes four marriage-groups or subsections; the total of eight forms the framework of a marriage and social system. To obtain a wife, a man theoretically considers whether he is Dua or Yiritja; a Dua man invariably marries a Yiritja woman. The problem is further complicated in that he, being Dua, belongs to one of the four Dua marriage-sections and therefore not only marries a Yiritja woman, but a woman who must be from one of its four marriage-subsections, although marriage into a specified second section is allowed. Children of this union take the father's Dua moiety, though they will not belong to his marriage-subsection, nor yet to the mother's, but to another indirectly determined by the mother's.

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
OI17 Murngin OI17

779 Totems in sacred ceremonies are known as 'maraian', and generally denote some utensil used by the Ancestors. Maraian may also be birds, animals, or fish intimately linked with the Ancestors. Parts of the nomad's anatomy, representing that of an Ancestor, and usually their reproductive organs, feature in song and dance. Such caricatures are accepted by the nomads, but I have seen consternation and embarrassment amongst mixed parties of white visitors attending these ceremonies.

779 796 614 621 778 Totemic beliefs link widely separated hordes, who meet for ceremonies connected with the creation myth, for bone-burying and for initiations. Several clans may be co-guardians of the same sacred site, such as the Reratjingo of Port Bradshaw and the Lia-gullomirry from the Woolen River, who are separated by about a hundred and fifty miles, yet both belong to the Dua moiety and have close connexions with a sacred well on the Woolen River where a great mythical snake in Creation days distinguished himself by swallowing two of the Ancestresses. Guardianship of this site has been mainly in the hands of the Woolen River horde, but at rare intervals Reratjingo men from Port Bradshaw make their way to the well and take part in the ceremonies. A sacred maraian, consisting of a painted hollow log, represents the snake, and is the centre of the rite, and at certain stages in the proceedings the leader blows through it to produce dull, booming reverberations which are said to be the voice of the snake. An old man of the visiting Reratjingo returned to Port Bradshaw, painted a similar maraian, and introduced the ceremony to his horde; now his sons, grandsons, and nephews carry out the ritual of this totem.

[178]

778 531 Some designs and myths, painted on maraian in coloured clays, or bound with string and parrot feathers, involve weeks of careful preparation. A shower of rain will efface the paint, moths may consume the string; the horde leader

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
OI17 Murngin OI17

must memorize the design. Blank spaces on maraian are due to the artist's loss of memory, and they freely admit that they have forgotten some parts of the design.

As well as having a link with the distant Woolen River, the Reratjingo had its own totem centre near Port Bradshaw, and were co-guardians with the Kalpu. But this did not guarantee unity, for the question of guardianship led to quarrels in which several were killed and the Reratjingo withdrawing to Melville Bay forty miles away. But the Kalpu victory was short lived, for in driving off the Reratjingo they so weakened the home-front, that their hereditary enemies, the Juppu of Blue Mud Bay, descended on them with such vindictiveness that the remnant fled to the English Company's Islands eighty miles away, and they have been on the defensive ever since.

Prolonged friendships between hordes does not prevent the sudden cessation of diplomatic relations, and an occasional killing. The Gerrkee from Cape Shield had fraternized, hunted, and camped for years with the Juppa. Though they were of opposite moieties, they exchanged secret law, held totemic dances, and seemed inseparable. Yet one night when I was visiting their camp I saw that they were at loggerheads, and soon afterwards they brandished their spears, attacked each other, yelling threats and obscenities. It all started at the end of a successful day's hunting, when everyone had more than enough to eat and a Juppa woman hit her Gerrkee husband with a digging-stick after a trivial disagreement. He retaliated by knocking her down and bumping her head on the ground. Her father heard her screams, and remonstrated with his son-in-law, who then called on his brothers for assistance. In a flash, both clans were in a fracas. Women used their digging-sticks, or lengths of wood from the camp-fires, and darted in amongst the men to deal their blows. Men slashed with yard-long flat spear-throwers. After an hour of bedlam,